



# Montgomery County Council

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*From the Office of Council Vice President Valerie Ervin    Oct. 19, 2010*

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Contact: Sonya Healy 240-777-7970 / Rich Romer 240-777-7957

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## **First Quiet Zone in Maryland Designated At Forest Glen Road Train Crossing**

**Council Vice President Ervin Works with Silver Spring  
Residents to Receive Noise Relief from Train Whistles**

ROCKVILLE, Md., October 19, 2010—Trains moving through an at-grade railroad crossing at Forest Glen Road in Silver Spring, located approximately one-quarter mile north of I-495, will no longer be required to blow their whistles after a two-year effort by Montgomery County Council Vice President Valerie Ervin. After she worked with residents to provide noise relief, the at-grade railroad crossing will be declared the first “Quiet Zone” in Maryland starting Nov. 1.

The Forest Glen Road crossing has minimal pedestrian and vehicle traffic, but was still subject to federal rules that require all trains to blow warning whistles when approaching the crossing.

“Residents living near this at-grade crossing will finally have some noise relief from the nearly 60 trains that pass this location each day,” said Council Vice President Ervin, who represents District 5, which includes Kensington, Silver Spring, Takoma Park and Wheaton. “Safety is paramount at train crossings, and locomotive engineers still have the discretion to use their whistles, even in a Quiet Zone.”

The Quiet Zone designation is the result of lobbying efforts by local residents and Council Vice President Ervin, who first wrote to the State Highway Administration (SHA) in October 2008 about the concerns of those living near the crossing.

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“This is an example of how all branches of government worked together with our residents to implement a long-awaited change to enhance the quality of life for one local community,” said Councilmember Ervin. “I want to thank Joe Rosenberg, who has worked on this issue for a decade; residents of Rock Creek Hills Citizens Association; and representatives from the Montgomery County Department of Transportation. I also want to thank representatives at the state and federal levels who examined this case and agreed that the residents of this area deserve this relief.”

The County has added protection for pedestrians, bicyclists and drivers through a series of safety measures to implement the Quiet Zone. Lighting and signage near the location have been enhanced. In addition, the County installed new lights above the tracks and provided appropriate signage nearby. A median barrier was installed to keep cars from going around the gates that are deployed when a train is coming. The County’s Department of Transportation is planning to put a sidewalk on either side of the tracks to make the area more walkable.

The County Department of Transportation’s first contact with the Rock Creek Hills neighborhood association dates back to about 2000. The neighborhood has been directly impacted by train whistles since June 2005, when, in response to a Congressional mandate, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) issued a rule on the “Use of Locomotive Horns at Highway-Rail Grade Crossings.” The outcome was a requirement that locomotive horns must be sounded as a warning to highway users at public highway-railroad crossings. The rule pre-empted any state or local laws that allowed for “whistle bans.”

Specific safety improvements that provide the same calculated level of accident risk reduction as a train locomotive horn must be in place before the FRA can designate an area as a Quiet Zone.

Forest Glen Road is a two-lane roadway with an average daily traffic volume of approximately 4,000 vehicles per day within the vicinity of the railroad crossing, which has trains passing through that are operated by CSX Transportation, Amtrak and Maryland commuter trains (MARC) – a total of approximately 60 trains per day.

FRA accident reports state that three vehicle-train crashes have occurred at this location in the last three decades. Two of the three crashes (in 1977 and in 1985) involved a vehicle driving around the lowered automated gates. The third accident (in 2000) consisted of a backhoe being struck while working on the tracks.

“We know that Quiet Zones are not appropriate for most railroad crossings,” said Councilmember Ervin, “but residents near the Forest Glen Road crossing believe that this was the right decision for their community. I was happy to support their efforts.”

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